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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 000823

SIPDIS

EUR/PGI FOR JODY BUCKENBERG, G-TIP FOR AMB MARK LAGON AND  
JENNIFER DONNELLY

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KCOR](#) [KCRM](#) [KJUS](#) [KWMN](#) [SMIG](#) [AM](#)  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR PRESSES TIP POINTS WITH DEPUTY PRIME  
MINISTER

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Classified By: AMB Marie L. Yovanovitch, reasons 1.4 (b/d).

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SUMMARY  
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11. (C) During her introductory call on Deputy Prime Minister Armen Gevorgian, the Ambassador pressed the GOAM to prosecute official complicity in trafficking of persons (TIP). Gevorgian pledged that the GOAM would strengthen its anti-trafficking efforts now that he has been appointed to chair the GOAM's ministerial Council to Combat Trafficking, and that he sought a continuation of open, honest communication with the Embassy on TIP. The Ambassador raised the 2006 case of an Uzbek trafficker who escaped Armenia with the help of corrupt officials, and stressed that prosecuting those responsible would show the GOAM's seriousness on TIP. While Gevorgian countered that the case had been settled with the firing of the officials, he undertook to look into it again at the Ambassador's request. END SUMMARY.

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THE ZAKHARYANTS TRAFFICKING CASE  
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12. (C) The Ambassador called October 6 on Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Territorial Administration Armen Gevorgian, who also was appointed several months ago to chair the GOAM's new ministerial council to combat trafficking in persons. The Territorial Administration Ministry oversees regional and local government, as well as the GOAM Migration Agency. The Ambassador pressed the GOAM to show more seriousness in dealing with official complicity in trafficking. She raised the February 2006 escape of Anush Zakharyants, a convicted Uzbek trafficker of Armenian lineage, who escaped from an Armenian prison with the assistance of corrupt prison administration officials and border guards.

13. (C) The Ambassador appealed to Gevorgian to reexamine the case and prosecute and convict the corrupt officials for their deeds. Prosecution of the case, added the Ambassador, would constitute concrete evidence of President Sargsian's strongly worded commitment to combat official corruption that featured prominently in his address to parliament on October 12. The Ambassador also noted that the GOAM would likely be judged on its progress in the case in the TIP Tier Two Watch List interim assessment in November. If unaddressed, the case could result in Armenia dropping to Tier Three with the issuance of next year's TIP report in April.

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14. (C) Gevorgian pushed back on the handling of the Zakharyants case, reminding that the corrupt officials had been fired from their positions and contending that this constituted appropriate punishment. Arguing that "firings are a form of convictions," Gevorgian stated that the corrupt head of the Armenian prison service had been promptly relieved of his duties as a result of his role in the escape.

He said that several months following his removal from office, the prison service director was also sentenced jail time for his role in a criminal scheme unrelated to the Zakharyants case. Gevorgian also said that the two border guards who had been approached by the prisons director to allow Zakharyants to flee the country likewise lost their jobs for complicity in the case.

15. (C) Gevorgian assured the Ambassador that he had recently looked into the case himself, in response to a request submitted by Emboffs at Gevorgian's July 4 TIP meeting with international donors and diplomatic representatives. (NOTE: On August 11, the Embassy received a courtesy copy of the inquiry Gevorgian initiated, which was conducted by an anti-corruption official from the Armenian presidency. The inquiry's results confirmed that the head of prison administration and the two border guards were dismissed from their jobs as a result of the incident. END NOTE.)

16. (C) The Ambassador acknowledged the administrative sanctions that had been meted out, but argued they still did not appropriately reflect the magnitude of the crime represented by trafficking. She reiterated that U.S. and international standards in such cases required a more substantive response, and hoped that Gevorgian would take a

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second look at the case. She emphasized that the proper response to this case was in Armenia's own interests as well, that it would serve as a powerful deterrent to would-be traffickers and help prevent the victimization of unsuspecting Armenian women and men.

17. (C) Sticking to his position that the job firings in the Zakharyants case appeared to him to be sufficient closure, Gevorgian nonetheless undertook to reexamine the case at the Ambassador's request. He said he would look again at the results of the recent inquiry. The Ambassador thanked the Deputy Prime Minister, and said she would send a letter to the Secretary of the Ministerial Council to Combat Trafficking detailing outstanding USG concerns with the handling of the official corruption in the case.

18. (C) Separately, Polchief had pushed the relevant MFA director, Dziunik Aghajanian, hard on the unresolved Zakharyants case, pointing out that the lack of criminal prosecution in this case remained the single biggest stain on Armenia's TIP record. He noted that not only was there no criminal prosecution, we had not seen evidence of a vigorous Armenian effort to locate and recapture Zakharyants. Aghajanian insisted the government had and continued to do all it could to track Zakharyants down. Polchief acknowledged that the new ministerial council, of which Aghajanian heads the secretariat, seemed to be making positive strides in fleshing out the institutions needed to deal with TIP properly, such as its national referral mechanism, shelter, and prevention programs, and welcomed the government's commitment to appropriate funds for the anti-TIP fight in the prevention, protection, and prosecution areas. He suggested that the GOAM provide us better information of the details of their efforts to recapture Zakharyants.

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TRYING OUR BEST  
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18. (C) Alluding to his recent appointment as the first ever chair of the new ministerial Council to Combat Trafficking, Gevorgian conceded the GOAM had a long way to go to strengthen its anti-trafficking efforts. Citing bureaucratic shortcomings, Gevorgian confided that the GOAM often had to rely on foreign-supplied information for its own trafficking cases. He thanked the Embassy for sharing information on the Zakharyants case, as well as recent information on a potential new case of trafficking that the Embassy raised in August, which he said law enforcement agencies were currently looking into. Gevorgian also confessed that the GOAM lacks real statistics on trafficking, and reiterated his thanks to the Embassy for sharing information with Armenian authorities on potential TIP cases. He assured the Ambassador that he would do his utmost to invigorate GOAM efforts on TIP, and said he sought to continue the open, transparent communication the GOAM has had with the Embassy on TIP to date.

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COMMENT  
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19. (C) Two years have elapsed since former Ambassador Evans first raised the Zakharyants case with the authorities. If it were not for persistent USG intervention, the GOAM likely would have done little or nothing to punish the implicated officials. We have continually reminded the GOAM that the punishment meted out in the case does not match the crime, and that no further action on the case risks dropping Armenia from the Tier Two Watch List, where it has stagnated four years running, to Tier Three. We believe the Deputy Prime Minister now understands the issue from our perspective, and we shall follow up with his deputies on the Ministerial Council to Combat Trafficking to push for action.  
YOVANOVITCH